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ABSTRACT

There is a movement at the Community College of Philadelphia to develop an interdisciplinary humanities course for both general studies students and career students. The goal of the course is students' active appreciation of the humanities, by their learning to perform basic rhetorical analyses of historically situated works, while understanding that every work is part of an ongoing historical debate. Linking freshman composition with an interdisciplinary humanities course to form one course taught jointly by a composition teacher and a humanities teacher will provide a content structure for the composition instruction, allow more time to be spent on both skills and content, and permit two instructors to share the content. The seminar format, the most effective way to teach such a class, will allow students opportunity to practice skills rather than just listen. Lectures will be kept at a minimum and emphasis will be on the analysis of the humanities work, rather than on historical information. The text for the course will be "The Humanities: Cultural Roots and Continuities," volume 2, along with reproduced materials or a brief book of readings. Interested faculty may attend an inservice training session on teaching writing across the curriculum prior to the spring 1983 semester when the rhetoric/humanities course will begin. Course designers hope this will become a required course taught by all members of the humanities faculty. (HTH)

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A SEMINAR IN RHETORIC AND THE HUMANITIES: Rationale and Structure

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submitted to: National Endowment of the Humanities

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INTRODUCTION:

The Community College of Philadelphia has programs which are aimed at meeting the needs of remedial and of honors students. However, little attention has been given to designing programs for the average student. In fact, the traditional Liberal Arts curriculum has been dismantled in response to demands arising out of the educational philosophies of the late '60's. Because of a somewhat random course selection and the rise of career education, students often leave the College with little historical knowledge of, or appreciation for, the humanities. This is occurring at a time when both humanists and employers are reaffirming the need for well rounded individuals. As a result, faculty and administrators at the Community College of Philadelphia are beginning to recognize more of a need to provide a traditional grounding in the humanities both to General Studies students (who have no specific requirements beyond basic writing courses) and to career students (who find little time in their curricula for more than an occasional course in the humanities). In addition, there has been a drop in enrollment in the humanities, such that faculty in the content areas are now in danger of being laid off and teachers trained in literature now find themselves teaching writing courses exclusively. Therefore, for reasons both of self-interest and pedagogy, there is a movement to develop an interdisciplinary humanities course.

INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMANITIES COURSE:

A committee, of which I am a member, has been working informally to develop a model for a humanities course. So far, though, our goals have been rather limited----to "expose" students to the humanities. Given that our students have such a deficient backgound, given the wealth of materials in the humanities, and given the fact that we are limited, because of programatic constraints, to one 3 credit course, it appeared that "exposure" was the best that we could expect. However, I now believe that this solution has come about as a result of a misformulation of the problem. We have been asking: "What do we, as teachers, want to do?"; rather than asking: "What is it that we want the students to be able to do?". Our goals have been limited because we viewed the teachers as doing the work, rather than the students. We have been working on a model of passive appreciation---- where appreciation is understood as "liking" or "being familiar with"---- rather than active appreciation. Active appreciation would require that students be able to do something----specifically to analyze works in the humanities.

Works in the humanities do not occur in a vacuum. Authors and artists are not isolated geniuses, as they are often caricatured and as many students believe. They are part of an ongoing historic debate in which our students can participate. In order to participate, though, they must learn to "appreciate" that every work in the humanities is of a particular genre, created in a particular historical context, aimed at a particular audience, "spoken" with

a particular voice, and created with a particular purpose in mind. In other words, they must be able to perform basic rhetorical analyses of historically situated works.

Our students tend to read the way they write----linearly, with at best, coordination, but little subordination of ideas. Thus, they fail to approach a text as a structured whole; but, rather, see it as a series of disjointed statements. As a result, they fail to see connections in written material and fail to make connections in their own thinking and writing. By a series of interrelated reading and writing assignments students can learn the basic communications skills necessary to participate in the Great Debate, while learning some of the historical background necessary to situate themselves within that debate.

James Kinneavy, in a speech before this Institute, claimed that the liberal arts education was destroyed in the early 20th Century when its component parts were parceled out among the English, Speech, and Philosophy Departments. The first step in reviving the liberal arts, then, is to reunite the pieces in one comprehensive course. This can be accomplished by linking freshman composition with an interdisciplinary humanities course to form one 6 credit rhetoric/ humanities course, which is taught jointly by a writing teacher and a humanities teacher.

This solves a number of problems. First of all, it solves a problem for the teacher of the composition course, who is trying to find a content base for a skills course. As Wendell Johnson said (and as our composition teachers have long recognized): "The....reason

for their (English teachers) failure is that they appear to place the emphasis on 'writing' rather than on writing-about-something-for-someone. You cannot write writing." (quoted in Moffett, p. 8)

Secondly, it solves two problems for the humanities course. Since some time would have to be spent on writing in the humanities course and since some time would have to be spent on content in the composition course, combining the courses would result in less repetition and allow more time to be spent on both skills and content. In addition, it would mean that there would be two teachers from different disciplines to handle the content. This is important because we have all been trained as specialists and, thus, none of us is really competent to teach a general humanities course. Since virtually all of the composition teachers have been trained in literary analysis, though, students would at least be guaranteed of having specialists in two areas in the humanities.

Because of financial considerations, the course could not be team taught in the traditional sense, with both teachers in the classroom at the same time. However, the course would have to be team planned and executed, with both instructors taking responsibility for skills and content. Indeed, the skills and content are so inextricably intertwined that it would be impossible to separate them for the purposes either of teaching or testing.

SEMINAR-WORKSHOP FORMAT:

Since the focus of the course is on rhetorical skills, the most effective method of teaching would be by means of seminar, to allow students the opportunity to practice and sharpen their skills. Too often, the only skill practiced by students in the classroom is that of

listening. Yet, they are tested on entirely different skills that they are never taught or allowed to practice. Within the seminar context, a number of student centered learning activities can be planned (including, for example, Bruffee's collaborative learning and peer review). Students can be encouraged to use writing as a process of discovery, to clarify their ideas, and to aid in understanding their reading assignments. Toulmin's (1979) method of analyzing arguments and Kinneavy's (1971) rhetorical model of discourse can be introduced to help students generate their own ideas as well as to help analyze the arguments in the textbook. The process of writing can, thus, be demystified by having the same analytic tools applied to the great works in the humanities as are applied to student writing. Conversely, students can learn to analyze their own writing by learning to analyze the writing of the "masters". In other words, the course allows for a dialectical relationship between learning to read and write critically in the humanities.

In order for this approach to work, lectures would have to be kept to a minimum. Brief lectures could be given at the beginning of seminar to explain rhetorical categories or to place the text within its historical context. The emphasis would be on the analysis of the humanities work, though, rather than on historical information. In fact, while not anachronistically ripping the primary source out of its historical context, the students should feel free to pursue those contemporary problems that are raised in the discussion of the text. After all, the purpose of the historical study is to show the relevance

of a solid grounding in the history of the humanities for any serious participation in the contemporary debate.

The Seminar approach solves a problem for the instructors, who might rightfully feel hesitant to lecture in a field in which they were not professionally competent. As seminar leaders, though, they would not be placing themselves in the position of an authority in the field (as a lecturer would); but as someone who is trying to read a text in much the same way as the students are. At least initially, the teachers would provide a model for the students in how to think out unfamiliar material.

TEXT:

As a text, Russell and I have selected The Humanities: Cultural Roots and Continuities, Vol. II, along with reproduced material or a brief book of readings. We can use an established textbook because it is the teaching methodology rather than the material (standard intellectual history) which is novel. This textbook has the advantage of combining a large number of relatively short primary sources, taken from a number of genre and disciplines, with secondary material to provide the historical context. Since there is a limited amount of material that can be covered in one course, and since we believe that it is most important to situate the student within the contemporary debate, we have chosen Vol. II which begins in the 17th Century, rather than Vol. I which ends there. The text is also particularly well suited for the Community College of Phila. audience, since it integrates (without forcing)a good deal of material related to the question of slavery in the U.S. and a good deal of material on and by

contemporary Black Americans.

Since we wanted to design a course which is generalizable to other faculty teams, we selected a textbook that is not idiosyncratic and that allows some freedom for selection. Thus, for example, from a rather standard presentation of the Enlightenment, American historians can choose to concentrate on its American rather than its European manifestation. Since each team might want to slant the course in a particular direction or include favorite works, we allowed for the possibility of supplementing the text with other primary documents (as we are doing to emphasize the 20th Century). However, we will recommend that the same basic text be used by all teachers to provide some uniformity of course content. Needless to say, though, the uniformity of method is more important to the distinctiveness of the course, than the uniformity of the content.

IMPLEMENTATION:

A member of the NEH Institute team will present an in-service training session on "teaching writing across the curriculum" to interested faculty members prior to the Spring '83 semester. The purpose will be to generate visibility for and interest in the rhetoric/humanities course which will be taught experimentally that semester. Russell and I will attend each others' classes and "debrief" ourselves after each class. The debriefing will serve as the basis for a written report and oral presentation to the Humanities Faculty at the Fall '83 Humanities Division meeting. If the course is

successful, we will offer it again in the Fall '83 semester and plan in-service training sessions for the Spring '84 semester to train faculty interested in teaching the course. Eventually, we expect this to be a required course taught by virtually all members of the Humanities Division. Among the benefits we expect are closer cooperation among members of the Humanities Division and the development of an approach to teaching reading and writing that content area teachers can (and hopefully will) apply to all the courses they teach.

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